



SAGEVets Newsletter

sage | Advocacy &
Services for
LGBT Elders
We refuse to be invisible™

May 2020

A Letter from the Manager

Dear SAGE Veterans and Friends:

I hope this newsletter finds you and those close to you well and safe. The last quarter has been quite a whirlwind for everyone. Despite the setbacks resulting from COVID -19, we had a very productive quarter. We were honored to partner with Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc. for an evening of deep dialogue celebrating Black History Month. We opened eight new legal cases for elder LGBT veterans and we are delighted to report that we had our first successful discharge upgrade case for a veteran discharged because of their sexual orientation. We have several similar cases pending, but since the [Restoration of Honor Act](#) (RoHA) was signed into law, we have seen an increase in the number of inquiries from veterans seeking discharge upgrades.



(l to r) A. Stewart, SAGEVets Program Manager, K. Williams, Senior Fellow & Director of the Military, Veterans, & Society Program at CNAS, D. Coy, NYS Health Foundation's Veterans' Health Officer

SAGEVets is working with the New York State Division of Veterans' Services to plan a community discussion about the implementation and benefits of the Restoration of Honor Act. We are profoundly grateful to be making plans with Colonel Jim McDonough, Director of the agency, to promote the official launch of the new policy during Pride month. For now, we look forward to continued conversations about this legislation with providers and veterans.

Earlier this fiscal year, SAGEVets participated in a study conducted by CNAS (Center for a New American Security) that focuses on [minority veterans in New York State](#). Findings of the study

were presented in February which described issues of health, housing, veteran benefits, and social functioning from the perspective of elder LGBT veterans.

We are profoundly grateful for the New York State Legislature and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for their support of the SAGEVets program and for helping leverage our effectiveness connecting elder LGBT veterans to life-changing benefits and services. If you have any questions about our program, or what veteran resources are available to you, please reach out. We would love to hear from you.

Respectfully,
Ashton



National Association of Black Military Women (NABMW)

We were looking forward to a special event commemorating Women's History Month with our friends at the NABMW. Unfortunately, the event had to be postponed due to COVID – 19. Our appreciation goes out to National President Patricia Jackson-Kelley, Brooklyn Chapter President Annette Tucker-Osborne, NYC Chapter President Carol St. Pierre, and our guest speaker, La Wanda Mobley, Middletown Drug Court Veterans Track Lead Mentor. We would also like to give a special thanks to Catherine Laporte, Northeast Region Chairwoman, for all of her hard work helping us plan this program. We look forward to re-scheduling soon to celebrate contributions made by black women in the U.S. military pre and post Don't Ask Don't Tell.

SAGEVets Nominates First Trans Woman, to NYS Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame

March 31st was International Transgender Day of Visibility. Trans elders face higher rates of poverty, unemployment and discrimination than LGBT older people in general, and these issues are not discussed as openly as they should be. In an effort to shift this collective consciousness, we have nominated social justice icon Renée Imperato as a candidate for the NYS Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame. SAGEVets has been fortunate to successfully nominate elder LGB veterans for the past two years, but this nomination could lead to the induction of the first transgender veteran, helping increase visibility of transgender individuals and their accomplishments.



Renée Imperato, social justice icon

Renée Imperato is a proud transgender woman who has lived a life fighting for the rights of others. She enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1967 and volunteered to go to Vietnam four times before finally serving in country. Two months after arriving, Renée was in a horrific traffic accident and hospitalized due to her injuries. Rather than accept a medical discharge, Renée insisted on fighting in the war and served the remainder of her time in Vietnam in combat while working in Military Intelligence.

Renée has a rich history as an effective advocate for veteran's health care, transgender rights, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Renée has been receiving her health care at the VA since the end of her enlistment. For a short time, she was an employee of the VA where she started learning about veterans' rights, and she quickly started advocating for the care of her fellow veterans. She has been fighting for veteran health care and entitlements ever since. Her advocacy has led other transgender veterans to "come out of the woodwork", as Renée puts it, who are now receiving appropriate care from the VA. She has also been very active in the LGBT Veterans Support Group at the Manhattan VA Medical Center. In addition to advocating for these important issues, Renée has also been very involved with advocating for LGBT elders.

Renée first arrived at SAGE (Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders) in 2016. Not only is she an active participant taking part in the many social programs at SAGE, she also served as Chair of the SAGE Advisory Council.

Renée cares deeply for veterans and anyone who has been marginalized. Today, she continues to dedicate her life to the liberation of all LGBTQ people, access to health care and entitlements for veterans, and advocating for the end of racism in the United States. She attributes her passion for protecting the rights and dignity of others to her experience serving in Vietnam, an experience that radicalized her views of social justice.

COVID – 19 Update

As with all service providers, COVID - 19 has presented us with unforeseen challenges. Everyone has been affected by this pandemic, and we are forced to reset every aspect of our lives, including how to provide supportive services to veterans. Through determination and innovation, we are rising to the occasion. We applaud the unified teamwork demonstrated by leaders of Veteran Service agencies across the State. Thank you to the NYS Division of Veterans' Services for their leadership in keeping providers updated and maintaining a sense of cohesion throughout the veteran space.

Since March, we have adapted the SAGEVets program to maintain social distancing. We are conducting one-on-one wellness checks to reduce social isolation and to share crucial resources. [SAGE has created a COVID -19 information page](#) to help keep elder LGBT people safe. The SAGE Veterans Support Group is now a tele-meeting. And we created a SAGEVets hotline for veterans to reach us in case of emergency health and legal concerns, (908) 977-6869. In addition, SAGEVets will be featured on a day of reflections and respect to honor lives lost on [Memorial Day in a virtual parade](#). SAGEVets is also a presenter at the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum's LGBT Pride Month Observance. We are grateful that we can continue to do our part to support those who we are indebted to, the brave veterans of our nation. Please see page 3 for additional resources and virtual events.

Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc.

On February 27, SAGEVets and [Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc. \(BVSJ\)](#) honored Black History Month with a forum that focused on the history of African-American people serving in the U.S. military before and after it was segregated. We also discussed issues faced by LGBT veterans of color with a focus on contemporary legal resources available to address those issues. The event was hosted by Suley Cruz, Site Manager at SAGE Harlem, and was attended by over 40 veterans, veteran service officers, and civilians.

Panelists for this program included: Wendy McClinton, appointed member of the NYC Mayor's Veterans Advisory Board, CEO of BVSJ, serves on the Board of Directors of the National Coalitions for Homeless Veterans; Herbert S. Jackson Sweat, Jr. Vietnam Veteran and founding member of Veterans of the Vietnam War (VWV), Inc.'s, Henry J. Green Post number one, where



(l to r): Herbert S. Jackson Sweat, Jr., founding member of Veterans of the Vietnam War; Ty Martin, Community Liaison at SAGE Center Harlem; Wendy McClinton, CEO of BVSJ; and A. Stewart, Manager of SAGEVets.

he is currently serving as Post Commander. He also serves as the Brooklyn Chapter Commander for the National Association for Black Veterans, Inc. (NABVETS), and the facilitator of the Veterans Action Group (VAG); and SAGE's very own Ty Martin, an openly gay black veteran of the U.S. Navy, and Community Liaison at SAGE Center Harlem.

It was thrilling to be part of this provocative program. We thank BVSJ and our panel for a conversation about a history shaped by African-Americans who served in the U.S. military from the Revolutionary War to Don't Ask Don't Tell. A [blog](#) about the event was posted along with a [full-length video](#).

COVID – 19 Resources and Virtual Events:

Resources:

- [New York State Division of Veterans' Services](#)
- [A Know Your Rights Guide for Transgender New Yorkers Navigating COVID-19](#)
- [VA Coronavirus information](#)
- [VA COVID Coach app](#) - to support self-care and overall mental health.
- [NYC Department of Veterans' Services](#)

Virtual Events:

- Intrepid -[Upcoming Virtual Tours and Talks](#) These include both [specialized programs](#) and our [ongoing free online programs](#) for children, teachers, families and lifelong learners.
- Veteran-writing workshop. Mondays from 6:30 – 8 p.m. through June 8th on Zoom. To register, contact Sharon Bailey, Admin, Dwyer Peer Support Program at sbailey@vettovetrc.org.
- [Bedford Stuyvesant's 9th Annual Memorial Day \(and First Virtual\) Parade](#) (SAGEVets is participating).

Feel Good Story: *My Marriage Was Broken. The Coronavirus*

Lockdown Saved It. Written by Robert W. Fieseler, author of, “Tinderbox: The Untold Story of the Up Stairs Lounge Fire and the Rise of Gay Liberation.” Article from the [Huffington Post](#).

SAGE Programming

• Caregiving

Many people don't think they are caregivers, but if you are assisting your partner, spouse, friend or neighbor with shopping, escorting to visits, laundry, household chores, cleaning, or just regularly checking in with them, you fit the description. Caregiving can be a rewarding but also challenging experience. If you are a caregiver, or if someone is helping you, SAGE can assist through its Caregiving support program. SAGE can provide counseling, individual and group support, case management, and also pay for respite homecare, group socialization or items that might be needed like Ensure, Depends, special shoes or even an air conditioner. For more information [click this link](#) or call 212-741-2247 and ask for the Care Manager on-call. SAGE's Caregiving Program is funded through the New York City Department for the Aging.

• Veteran Support Group (VSG) – Now offered as a telephone meeting

Fridays from 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm. Please call (646) 518-9742. When prompted, enter Conference ID: 921 275 24#. The VSG is facilitated by Shawanna Boyd, Care Manager at SAGE. Join us for engaged casual conversation.

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